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Kidnappers Said to Demand Americans Leave Lebanon

By JOHN KIFNER

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BEIRUT, Lebanon, Jan. 11 — An anonymous caller asserted today that the kidnapping of an American Roman Catholic priest here this week was part of a campaign to force all Americans to leave Lebanon.

The caller said he represented Islamic Holy War, a shadowy group that had previously claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in Lebanon, including the truck bombings of the American Embassy and the American and French marine barracks.

The caller said that if all Americans left Lebanon, the abducted priest, the Rev. Lawrence M. Jenco, would be freed, along with four other Americans who have disappeared here in the last 10 months.

Although it had been widely assumed here that at least three missing Americans were being held by what is believed to be a loosely organized cell of Shiite Moslem zealots, this was the first formal assertion by a group that it had carried out the kidnappings.

Same Caller as Before

While it was impossible to verify the authenticity of the claim, staff members at the Beirut bureau of The Associated Press, where the call was received, said the same individual had previously called on behalf of Islamic Holy War.

Western intelligence sources have said they believe the kidnapped Americans were being held hostage for the release of some or all of the 17 men, 3 of

them under death sentence, convicted in the truck bombings of the American and French Embassies in Kuwait in December 1983. Most are Shiite Moslems from Iraq, affiliated with the Iranian-backed underground organization Al Dawa, or the Call.

Father Jenco, the director of the Catholic Relief Services operation here, which helps refugees and other war victims, was kidnapped on his way to work Tuesday morning by at least eight gunmen.

Church officials said the 50-year-old priest, who is from the Chicago area, had a severe heart problem and required special medicine.

The anonymous caller today said: "After the pledge that we have made to the world that no Americans would remain on the soil of Lebanon and after the ultimatum we have served on American citizens to leave Beirut, our answer to the indifferent response to this ultimatum was the kidnapping of Mr. Jenco."

Priest 'Is in Good Shape'

"We announce that Mr. Jenco is in good shape. We have allowed a cardiologist to examine him on Wednesday, and he is in good shape."

Then the caller ended his message with an ominous indication of the tensions within the Shiite community between Nabih Berri, the moderate leader of the Amal organization — who this week helped secure the release of a kidnapped Swiss diplomat — and more

militant factions.

"Finally, we address a special warning to Mr. Nabih Berri that he will bear the responsibility of any intervention to release any of the Americans we hold because we are the stronger and we shall remain the stronger," he said.

Asked by an A.P. employee what the conditions were for the release of the hostages, the caller replied, "All Americans should leave Lebanon."

Asked if this included newsmen, the caller said: "No, newsmen are exempt. We shall release all five we are holding without any conditions if our demand is heeded."

When asked if all five were still alive, he said, "Inshallah," or "God willing."

In addition to Father Jenco, the Americans who have disappeared here are Jeremy Levin, the chief of the Cable News Network bureau; William

Buckley, a political officer of the American Embassy; Benjamin Wier, an elderly Presbyterian minister, and Peter Kilburn, a 60-year old librarian at the American University of Beirut with several serious medical problems.

Meanwhile in West Beirut today, a car bomb went off outside a branch of the Bank of Beirut and Arab Countries, killing three passers-by and wounding 14 others seriously.